

Service-Learning Enriches Advertising Knowledge, Builds Students' Portfolios, and Promotes Community Engagement after Graduation

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This study investigated the influence of a service-learning component in an advertising course, specifically examining its ability to enrich advertising knowledge, build students' portfolios, and influence students' community engagement after graduation. The research revealed that service-learning positively affects students' understanding of advertising principles and concepts; students are more likely to try harder and dedicate more time to an authentic project; participation in an authentic project provides ethos for students' portfolios; and students have the opportunity to experience other communities and the dynamics of their residents. Documenting the outcomes of service-learning is central to promoting the value of community-engaged teaching in the field of advertising education.

Introduction: Service-Learning and Advertising Education

The goal of this study was to understand how a service-learning component improves undergraduate advertising students' comprehension of advertising principles and concepts, as well as how it enhances their portfolio for career purposes. In addition, this study sought to determine if students exposed to service-learning would continue to engage in a community, other than their own, upon graduation.

Service-learning is a beneficial teaching method for advertising students in a number of ways worth explicating to frame a study of community engagement in the field of advertising education:

1. One, service-learning projects are authentic (Petkus, 2000). Students take such projects more seriously than fictional or imagined exercises. Service-learning requires them to take ownership of their work that may be used for advertising purposes by a community organization.
2. Because service-learning projects are authentic, students have a tendency to be more creative; thus, individual expression shines.
3. Students can use the service-learning project to enhance the ethos, or credibility, of their portfolio by illustrating to potential employers that they have a working knowledge of advertising

- principles and concepts (Cook, 2008).
4. Potential employers like to see authentic projects during the interview process. As one St. Louis advertising agency president said, “Please tell your students I want to see ‘real’ projects, not assignments done for class. This way, I know they understand the importance of meeting deadlines, working in teams, and paying attention to the details” (K. Boyer, personal communication, May 18, 2010).
 5. Students are trained in strategic planning and taught that before concepting can begin an understanding of the marketplace and current and potential customers is key – this knowledge is afforded through direct contact with community partners.
 6. Students have the opportunity to “pitch” the client (Cook, 2008). Preparing a single advertising piece or a campaign is one component of the agency/client relationship. The other component is the ability to stand before the client and speak intelligently about the proposed campaign, how it resonates with the target audience, why a medium (or several media outlets) is the most effective at reaching the target audience, and how the copy (i.e., the words in the ad) and the creative (i.e., the visual in the ad) gains the attention of current and potential customers.
 7. Service-learning projects are measurable. As a result, students can gauge whether their advertising project was effective.
 8. After measuring the results, students are able to reflect (Petkus, 2000). Reflection advances knowledge because it extends the lens of examination. For example, reflection analyzes the following: What worked, what did not work, what needs to be changed in the future, what needs to stay the same, whether the team structure needs to be reorganized, and how to reduce cost without reducing effectiveness.
 9. Involvement in service-learning projects allows students to resolve issues that may develop while working as a team. It teaches students that each person is an integral part of the team; they learn how to synergize and take responsibility; and they discover how one student’s behavior can affect the dynamic of the entire team.
 10. The pedagogy of service-learning benefits advertising students because it teaches them about the entire process – from understanding the needs of the client, to gathering marketplace data, segmenting and then targeting the audience, writing and creating, production, and finally, measuring the effectiveness of the advertising (Cook, 2008).

In sum, advertising knowledge is altered through service-learning projects,

because engagement with community partners enables students to work on an authentic advertising piece or campaign; extends advertising knowledge by including printing and bindery terminology as well as direct involvement in the process; strengthens interpersonal skills by communicating with other students, the client (i.e., the community partner), and vendors; completing the project on deadline even if it means the client making multiple changes to the advertising piece or campaign; and staying within the budget.

Advertising educators, if they do not already, need to understand the benefits service-learning can provide to their students in terms of their professional content knowledge and professional development. Service-learning projects in advertising courses offer students problem-solving skills, ability to gather and analyze research, interpersonal skills to work in teams (similar to that of an agency), varying communication styles, understanding of principles and concepts, as well as the application (Cook, 2008; Klink & Athaide, 2004; Nicastro & Jones, 1994). Given the strategic and creative nature of advertising, projects are more interesting and engaging than straight lecture, which leads to greater comprehension and retention. In addition, students assume the role as advertising consultant (Easterlig & Rudell, 1997), which requires leadership, self-motivation, and the willingness to succeed.

Furthermore, advertising and marketing disciplines are ideal for implementation of a service-learning component, because “[a]ll but the biggest and most well-established nonprofit organizations need help in developing and disseminating their message” (Petkus, 2000, p. 68). In addition, nonprofit organizations are “...more receptive to students with limited” advertising and marketing experience “...because these organizations often ...are run by members that may not have formal” advertising and/or marketing training (Klink & Athaide, 2004, p. 145). Ultimately, any organization that has a product or a service needs advertising. Advertising is the means by which consumers are informed, persuaded, and in some cases entertained.

Methodology and Context of the Study

To analyze the effects of a service-learning component for students in an undergraduate advertising course, the research question posed, “How does service-learning enrich advertising knowledge, build students’ portfolios, and promote community engagement after graduation?” The study was conducted using the qualitative research methodology of focus group interviewing to understand advertising students’ experience with a service-learning component embedded in the course curriculum. Focus group interviewing is defined as an interview style for small groups; no fewer than

eight and no more than 15 (Berg, 2001). Under the direction of a mediator (or researcher), focus group participants engage in a discussion to encourage subjects to "...speak freely and completely about behaviors, attitudes, and opinions they possess" (Berg, 2001, p. 111). Berg (2001) contended that focus groups are dynamic, because they promote a "synergistic group effect" (p. 112). Synergistic group effect promotes a "far larger number of ideas, issues, topics, and even solutions to problems can be leveraged..." (Berg, 2001, p. 112). Because focus group interviews are based upon group interaction among the participants rather than the mediator, "...greater emphasis is given to the subjects' viewpoints" (Berg, 2001, p. 115).

This method enabled the researcher to understand students' views, opinions, experiences, and attitudes related to service-learning (Berg, 2001). More specifically, focus group interviewing was used because a critical component of service-learning is student reflection; focus groups succeed because the sharing of ideas leads to more robust insights. Reflection creates bridges between the service-learning experience and the principles and concepts of the discipline (Gardner, 1997; Petkus, 2000). Furthermore, focus groups are phenomenological. As a result, data was analyzed using bracketing to "...hold some phenomenon up close for careful inspection. It is removed from the natural world where it occurs and is then examined" (Berg, 2001, p. 116). Bracketing is defined as "...an investigator's identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study's data" (Fischer, 2009, p. 583). Thus, the researcher brackets intentions to acknowledge "...engagement in the development of consensual (but always evolving) understanding of the research phenomena and processes" (Fischer, 2009, p. 583).

As the researcher, I entered the study aware of my institutional positioning as an Associate Professor of Teaching in the Department of Theatre, Dance, and Media Studies, specifically Media Studies, with a concentration in advertising. Prior to teaching, I was employed by an advertising agency and a direct marketing company, and because of this industry experience, I am attuned to the power of authentic portfolios; potential employers like to view such work (e.g., billboard) or a campaign (e.g. broadcast, print, social media) during an interview. This research is tailored to educators who teach advertising, marketing, public relations, and communication studies because these subjects utilize the media to disseminate a message. However, this research may be applied across other disciplines, because skills such as working in teams, paying attention to details, planning, measuring results, completing work within a budget, meeting deadlines, and working with a client are experiences applicable to many professions. Furthermore, these professions and others use advertising to communicate to current and potential customers.

The service-learning project was conducted in the course, Creative Advertising. The course is dedicated to the following topics: differentiating a company's brand from a competing brand, researching consumers and the marketplace, generating ideas for the visual and the words in the advertisement, and purchasing media to disseminate the message to potential customers. The students (or research participants) in this study were required to participate in the service-learning project in addition to completing an internship, which is required for the degree in Media Studies. The internship enables students to compare theoretical ideas learned in the classroom within the world of work and provides students with a practical real world experiences in their chosen field. Although internships and service-learning are both considered forms of experiential or applied learning, the major difference between an internship and a service-learning project is that students are able to demonstrate the concepts of a particular course or field while toward specific civic ends, while internships most often provide generalized career or job-oriented skills. Students in the Creative Advertising course were required to participate in the service-learning project, namely because the experience would generate an authentic piece for their job interview portfolios. College graduates seeking a career in advertising are expected to show potential employers a portfolio. In fact, it is the key to an advertising graduate gaining entry into the field (Advertising Education Foundation, 2012).

Another reason why students in the Creative Advertising course were required to engage in the service-learning project was because as the professor, I was also one of several at the university selected to play a role in the university's newly created department dedicated to students and service, as well as a key faculty member for the Learn and Serve America Higher Education grant. The institution is the largest public, four-year institution in St. Louis, Missouri. As a public institution, one mission is to serve the greater community and the neighborhood surrounding the campus. One way the university fulfills this mission is through the Students of Service program, which involves more than 1,400 students working in excess of 23,000 hours of service with community leaders, teachers, and residents. Service-learning is part of this broader program. In 2010, four courses offered a service-learning component with additional courses added each year (Shafferkoetter, 2010).

Theoretical Context

The goal of service-learning is to engage students in the community while building their academic and civic skills (Learn and Serve Clearinghouse, 2010). On a national level, Eyler and Giles (1999) reported that 58% of students who had a service-learning component in their course

learned more than students who did not have a service-learning component. Academic advantages have been shown to include commitment and engagement in their studies (Sax & Astin, 1997), enhanced critical and thinking skills related to problem-solving (Eyler & Giles, 1999), mastery of curriculum (Strage, 2004), connections between what is taught in the classroom to external in-field experiences (Strage, 2004), and a more developed appreciation for the discipline (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Service-learning offers advantages to students as well as to the faculty, the community, and the institution. For faculty, our role as educators changes from *giver* of knowledge to *facilitator* of knowledge (Easterling & Rudell, 1997). This means that students take an active role in the meaning-making process by application rather than regurgitating memorized information on an examination. In addition, service-learning inspires new teaching methods, because each service-learning project requires a variety of teaching strategies. Service-learning offers advantages to the community because students serve as a substantial human resource to address a need of the community (Heiselt & Wolverton, 2009). In addition, the community partner serves as a co-educator for the students. Service-learning extends advantages to the institution as it bridges relationships with community partners.

Informing many service-learning practitioners are two theories recognized for understanding how students make meaning and ultimately learn: experiential learning and constructionism. Kolb's experiential learning theory drew from the work of John Dewey and Jean Piaget. He contended that meaning takes place when students have direct experience both personal and environmental (Itin, 1999). Unlike constructionism, experiential learning does not require a teacher, as the making of meaning resides in the student and his/her experiences (Itin, 1999). As a result, experiential learning requires students to possess qualities such as self-initiative and self-evaluation. The theory is considered effective when students learn to set goals, experiment and observe, review, and take action.

Connected to experiential learning theory is constructionism (not to be confused with constructivism), developed by Seymour Papert. Papert believed that students are more likely to form new ideas and construct knowledge when they are engaged as the designer and the constructor. Hence, the idea of constructionism is "learn-by-making" (Papert & Harel, 1991). Professors assist students to learn-by-making by serving as a mediator rather than an instructor. Constructionism takes the making of meaning further and solidifies the greater intellectual structures, because the theory incorporates what Papert defines as the "public entity" (Weiss, Nolan, Husinger, & Trifonas, 2006). The public entity provides students the benefit to show, discuss, reflect, and collaboratively examine their

tangible object in the real world (Papert, 1993).

Although both theories require students to learn by doing or to learn by making, the theory most applicable to this research is constructionism, because students assume the role of designer and constructor while the professor serves as the mediator (in advertising lingo, the mediator is defined as the Creative Director). In addition, constructionism is the learning theory most applicable to the field of media studies. Advertising occurs in the media and engages the audience in the construction of meaning through interpretation (Wicks, 2001).

Participants and Course Context

A total of 30 service-learning participants were involved in the study. Undergraduate students were asked to participate in this study because their course was designated as a service-learning course. In addition, and more critically, this course was selected because the curriculum matched the needs of Beyond Housing, a community organization that needed students who had experience in advertising. To combat the foreclosure crisis, Beyond Housing offered mortgage concern assistance for residents in the Normandy, Missouri, area. The organization needed to “get the word out” about foreclosure resources so residents would be inclined to seek out and find value in the services offered by Beyond Housing. These services would teach residents in crisis how to retain ownership of their homes. In addition to the foreclosure assistance, the organization offered supplemental workshops that highlighted how to maintain one’s home and financial stability. The advertising students’ project required them to draw upon their educational experiences in advertising principles, copywriting, and design.

The Course and Service-Learning Project

Creative Advertising explores the fundamentals of the creative process by discussing selling messages, marketplace diversity, research, strategy, layouts, and the creative brief. The goal of the course links to the goal of this service-learning project, because the community partner had an advertising need that required research, a specific selling message targeting primarily an African-American community, and a creative message that would resonate with the target audience.

Every student enrolled in the advertising course engaged in the service-learning project for community partner Beyond Housing. Students were not given an option to opt-out of the project, because authentic as opposed to fictitious projects are more credible in a student’s portfolio shown during an interview. In addition, students are more engaged with an

authentic project because the project requires students to take on a heightened level of responsibility with the final outcome being a completed advertising piece. Most important, each aspect of the service-learning project mirrored work performed by advertising professionals in industry. Such work included understanding the brand and how it differentiates from its competitors, researching the target audience, writing copy that speaks to the target audience, creating the images that resonate with the target audience's life style, and evaluating the effectiveness of the advertising. Thus, students experienced first-hand an advertising project from start to finish.

The project began by the professor defining service-learning for the students. The need and the project were established by Beyond Housing: to communicate to homeowners foreclosure resources and workshops about how to maintain one's home and financial stability. The students needed to understand the audience (residents) and the marketplace (neighborhoods) before any writing or creativity could begin. Beyond Housing's President and Chief Executive Officer and Housing Coordinator visited the classroom. The purpose of their visit was for the students to gather data – data which would be pivotal to the copy and the design. The students learned that a door hanger would be distributed to ten municipalities; near the university's campus: Beverly Hills, Hanley Hills, Hillside, Normandy, Northwoods, Pagedale, Pine Lawn, Velda City, Velda Village Hills, and Wellston. Students also learned that they would be communicating on the door hanger how to address mortgage concerns and weekly workshops. During this visit, students were able to ask an array of questions to better understand the audience and the marketplace. Outside of the classroom, students continued to research the ten municipalities so the right message with the right creative approach would garner the attention of the residents.

After the research was complete, students worked in small groups (five students per group with a total of six groups). Students worked in groups so they could mimic positions found at an advertising agency: account services/planning, art director, copywriter, graphic designer, and trafficker. In addition, small groups allowed for better communication among members. Furthermore, six teams meant six door hangers from which Beyond Housing could choose. Hence, a friendly competition ensued among the student groups. After thumbnails (i.e., primarily sketches) were produced, each group presented its idea to the class. Constructive feedback was offered to strengthen the copy and the creative design. During this time, students learned that a workshop for job searchers was being removed from the door hanger. They also learned that new copy needed to be inserted for the Handy Homewoner workshop (plumbing, electrical, energy efficiency, outdoors/landscaping and floors/walls) as well as eliminating a topic (ways to save money on your energy bill). In addi-

tion, the client decided to eliminate time-sensitive data such as workshop dates from the door hanger. Furthermore, two additional logos were added. This taught students that the client is at liberty to make changes during the copy and the creative process; however, the project still required the deadline to be met. Upon completion of each door hanger, the students presented it to the professor before the presentation to Beyond Housing. Again, students learned a lesson, the power of proofing. For example, one group had the wrong phone number. Once the professor (who served the role as Creative Director) approved each group's door hanger, I then presented the six designs to the Housing Coordinator via email. A committee at Beyond Housing chose the winning door hanger with a few minor changes. The changes were discussed in class, so each team could experience the revision process (see Appendix A for the final product).

Once the winning door hanger was selected by a committee at Beyond Housing, it had to be printed and cut – another learning activity for the students. Students learned about four-color process, coating, and bleeds, as well as a die-cut which makes the hole in a door hanger. The students also learned about pricing and working within the client's budget. A total of 10,000 door hangers were printed at 12 cents each. The door hangers were printed by the campus print shop, so students were able to witness the printing process.

The final part of the process was distributing the door hangers. This meant students had to step outside of their familiar community and into another. Before leaving for their assigned community, the Housing Coordinator met with the students to discuss safety. She informed the students that the local police had been notified that they would be in the community and that they should not approach homes with open front doors or homes that were vacant. Students assembled in groups and the Housing Coordinator distributed to the students a specific number of door hangers; the intent was to know how many door hangers were distributed. With a map of the community in hand, the students set out to distribute the door hangers. The Housing Coordinator and the professor canvassed each neighborhood to check on the safety of the students. In total, 2,000 door hangers were distributed by 30 students in one afternoon. The remaining 8,000 door hangers were distributed by volunteers.

Outcomes for University and Community Partners

Student Perspectives

Prior to engaging in the qualitative research method of focus group interviewing, the research was approved by the university's Internal Review Board (IRB) and students gave written consent to use their comments.

Students responded to a series of questions presented by their professor. The purpose of using focus group interviews was so each student could reflect on the service-learning experience, "...freely and completely about behaviors, attitudes, and opinions they possess" (Berg, 2001, p. 111). It is important to note that before each class session began, students were able to reflect, as individuals and as a class, about the project and the process. However, for the purposes of this research, data from the last focus group was presented. The questions and responses were:

1. ***What did you learn, if anything, from the service-learning component with community partner Beyond Housing?***

The two most common answers were giving back to a community and making learning real. Several students commented: "I learned that with service-learning you are doing something educational, you are doing something that is helpful and makes a difference. Also, you are actually doing something that is credible and in real-world as compared to a classroom project." "I learned that sometimes giving back in even the simplest ways (like donating time), can be more beneficial and have more impact than by simply donating money."

2. ***Explain if you think advertising principles and concepts were better understood because of the service-learning activity – designing door hangers.*** Each student stated with conviction that advertising principles and concepts were better understood because the class activity allowed them to see how advertising works, the importance of details such as targeting the audience, and open communication with the client. One student explained: "Yes, most definitely because you can only learn so much out of a textbook or taking a quiz. With the door hanger project we got to take what we've learned in class and actually bring it to life. Since this was something that was actually real and was going to be implemented in the community, everyone took it seriously and really put good effort into it." Another student echoed a similar thought: "I enjoyed that I received first-hand experience by working with an actual organization. It's certainly one thing to sit in a classroom and read about it, but to actually get out and get first-hand experience made me so much more aware of how advertising works."

3. ***Explain if you think you made a difference in the community because of your advertising project – door hangers.*** The students commented that if they made residents

in the communities more aware of Beyond Housing and its services, then they made a difference. The first step of any advertising message is to gain attention or awareness. And the students did just that – attendance at the workshops increased. During the door hanger distribution, one resident approached a female student. The student reflected on that moment: “I will never forget while passing out the hangers a woman came up to me and asked what we were doing and I was able to tell her about the workshops (I knew this because we learned about the workshops extensively). She was so excited to know that there was help out there. She said she was on the way to losing her house. I told her to make sure she called Beyond Housing because they would take good care of her.”

4. ***Do you use the Beyond Housing door hanger in your portfolio?*** All students said they are using or will use the Beyond Housing door hanger in their portfolio because it is an authentic project that allowed them to engage in each step of the process. “...it demonstrates a ‘real-world’ story-piece I can speak of in a job interview. Also, the Beyond Housing door hanger will be beneficial to my portfolio because it illustrated how my work created ‘real-world’ results,” declared an ambitious advertising student.
5. ***Do you prefer “fictitious” advertising projects or authentic advertising projects and why?*** All students except one overwhelmingly preferred authentic projects as compared to “fictitious” projects because they offer real insights and results. In addition, authentic projects are meaningful, rewarding, and beneficial. Furthermore, authentic projects simulate working at an agency. One student declared, “I overwhelmingly prefer ‘real’ advertising projects over ‘fictitious’ because it puts me inside a ‘real-world’ scenario of working at an advertising agency where I have to work effectively in groups with various personality types, experience of working with a client, witnessing the ‘real’ results of my work and also the creative process is much more exciting when you know your work will be seen by many in the general public.” The sole student who did not overwhelmingly prefer authentic projects said she likes a balance of authentic and fictitious. She thinks fictitious projects are valuable for learning advertising principles and concepts and authentic projects are useful to demonstrate mastery of the skills learned.

6. ***Do you take more pride in an advertising project that is authentic? Please explain.*** Unequivocally, all students said “yes” to this question. “I take more pride in something that’s real because it’s something that you will actually be judged on and you’re doing it for someone else. If it’s real you are actually being hired to produce something of quality. If it’s for a grade then it doesn’t have to be taken as seriously,” said a male student. Another student commented that she takes more pride “...especially when it is community related.”
7. ***Do you take more pride in an advertising project that benefits the community?*** The majority of the students said they do take more pride in such a project. One student explained: “I have great pride as a native of St. Louis. I want nothing more than what will benefit the community as a whole. Although many college students would love to help their community, it is sometimes difficult finding how and/or the time to do so. Therefore, service-learning solves this problem by allowing students to engage in college studies while simultaneously benefiting the community.” Two students who were not totally committed said they believe that those living in the community need to help themselves. A male student said, “I would like to think that I am helping the community, but it ultimately comes down to the community stepping up and helping themselves.”
8. ***Are you more or less likely to offer assistance to a community organization after graduation? Please explain.*** The majority of the students said they would engage in a community organization after graduation. However, the only reason they would not is because of time constraints or because their full-time, paying job comes first. One student was firm in her conviction to offer assistance to a community organization: “I am very likely to offer assistance to community organizations after graduation and even while in school because this is MY community. I want it to continue to be a thriving environment for the future.” Several students said they are not likely to engage in the community because they do not engage now and cannot see this changing in the future.
9. ***What were the major benefits of working on the door hanger project?*** Students shared several benefits with the major one the ability to work on an authentic project. Other benefits included working as a team, brainstorming ideas, understanding creative terms such as bleeds, and designing

advertising for the sole purpose of helping a community.

10. ***What were the negatives of working on the door hanger project?*** Two negatives were cited in regard to the door hanger project. One, some students felt that they were placed in unsafe neighborhoods and some neighbors did not respond well to them until they were made aware of the students' intentions. Another negative cited was the working conditions. Some students preferred to work outside the confines of the classroom. As one student explained: "It was hard working in the classroom. It would be better to meet in a place that's more private and less hectic where you're not hearing other groups and their ideas."

Community Partner Perspectives

Overwhelmingly the students positively benefited from working on the service-learning project and so did Beyond Housing. The students benefited because the course provided them the opportunity to "learn-by-making" (Papert & Harel, 1999); they assumed the roles of designer and constructor. Our community partner Beyond Housing benefited from the service-learning project because it contributed to the mission of Beyond Housing: to strengthen neighborhoods, one family at a time. The organization accomplishes its mission by providing affordable housing and homeownership services; providing support services to families, children, and seniors; being a catalyst for community-wide rebuilding efforts; empowering residents to be leaders of their own neighborhood revitalization efforts; and promoting individual and community asset building (Beyond Housing, 2010). The door hanger project reinforced and extended the message that Beyond Housing is there to assist with housing concerns in the form of workshops specific to the community. The workshops bridge the relationship between Beyond Housing and the residents.

A bridge was also connected between the community and the university. Working with Beyond Housing, the university is perceived as a partner to this community organization. Chris Krehmeyer, President and Chief Executive Officer of Beyond Housing, said with enthusiasm: "We have never had door hangers before. They will get a lot of information into the hands of people who need it. Plus, the students hung for us. It's a great way to show and teach folks about community development work" (UMSL Magazine, 2010).

The Housing Coordinator, who had the most contact with the professor and the students, offered her perspective. Through written consent, the Housing Coordinator agreed to have her comments shared.

The professor asked the Housing Coordinator to reflect regarding the following:

1. ***Explain your experience working with the students on the project.*** “Working with the students was a very pleasant experience. Each time I interacted with them it was clear that they cared about our project and took it seriously. When I explained the project to them in the beginning, they were engaged and asked insightful questions. I could tell each project group spent a great deal of time creating its door hanger design. Finally, they were ready and willing to help distribute the finished product to the local neighborhoods.”
2. ***Do you think students make valuable partners?*** “Students are valuable...because they are able to look at a situation with a fresh perspective and come up with creative marketing ideas that the Beyond Housing staff would not think of. They devoted many hours to a project that they did not get paid for. Indeed, Beyond Housing was able to get a professional product without needing to hire a professional marketing firm – an expense the organization would not have the money to accommodate.”
3. ***What was the major advantage of working with students... what was the major disadvantage?*** “The major advantage to working with the students was that we had many great design options from which to choose. I’m not sure that a professional advertising firm would have done a door hanger much better than the one we chose as the winning design. The only disadvantage to working with the students is that we needed our project to fit naturally into a semester’s timeline.”
4. ***Do you think the service-learning project contributed to the students’ academic growth?*** “I do believe the Beyond Housing advertising project contributed to the students’ academic growth. Rather than working on an abstract project that would not go beyond the classroom, students got to sink their teeth into a real-world project. They had to work through all of the complexities involved in engaging a specific community in St. Louis and advertising a community enrichment class. At the end of the project, students had a sample door hanger design to add to their portfolios. They also learned a great deal about the work our non-profit does in the community.”

5. ***How did you like working with a faculty member?*** “[The faculty member] contributed a great deal to the success of the partnership between Beyond Housing and the university. She maintained an open line of communication and was available to answer questions whenever they arose. She also ensured that the students took the project seriously and completed their projects in a timely manner. Her continual feedback on her student’s designs ensured they were the best product they could be. Finally, her enthusiasm for service-learning helped Beyond Housing staff feel very comfortable handing this project over to her students.”

6. ***What does working with an educational institution mean to Beyond Housing?*** “Beyond Housing believes in the value of partnering with educational institutions, particularly the University of Missouri, St. Louis. In recent years, Beyond Housing has focused on the 24 communities that make up the Normandy School District in St. Louis. The university campus is housed within one of these communities and has a very positive impact on the Normandy School District footprint. It was nice to have the local students work on a project so ‘close to home.’ Furthermore, it is nice to work with students because their work with Beyond Housing may inform their future work in the community.”

7. ***Does service-learning fit Beyond Housing’s objectives/mission and why?*** “Beyond Housing’s mission is to ‘strengthen neighborhoods, one family at a time.’ Service-learning certainly fits into this objective. The project the students worked on was to get the word out about financial fitness and home repair classes as well as foreclosure intervention services. Neighborhoods are greatly impacted by every foreclosure that occurs. The fewer foreclosures a neighborhood experiences, the stronger the neighborhood is. The work the students did helped increase awareness throughout several communities in the Normandy School District footprint. The local neighborhoods are also strengthened every time a student becomes more engaged in the issues of the community.”

Specifically speaking to the effectiveness of the door hangers, the Housing Coordinator noted that as a result of the 2,000 door hangers distributed by the students, approximately 40 residents inquired about the workshops. An additional 17 residents enrolled in the foreclosure prevention workshop. Although Beyond Housing and the students desired a greater response, according to the Housing Coordinator, the response rate may have been

lower in other municipalities other than Pagedale, Missouri, because residents in these communities are not as familiar with the Beyond Housing brand:

The door hangers were likely more effective in Pagedale because Beyond Housing has had a presence in Pagedale for the last 10 years. We have a Pagedale Family Support Center that provides services to the community such as food pantry and after-school/summer child care. Beyond Housing has also built or repaired hundreds of houses in Pagedale, and just recently built a grocery store for the Pagedale community. Pagedale residents who know Beyond Housing would be more likely to trust that the door hanger was providing legitimate information. The 24:1 initiative is looking to change that right now [24:1 is a strategic plan that will extend Beyond Housing's services by teaming up with other municipalities with a shared vision].

Faculty Perspectives

From a faculty perspective, I noted advantages and disadvantages working on the service-learning project. One advantage: The project enabled me to extend the walls of the classroom. Extending the walls of the classroom meant that students could step outside the confines of the textbook and learn-by-doing with an authentic advertising project that would be used to communicate to homeowners. Because the advertising project was authentic, students worked harder and vested themselves in the work because their names were assigned to the work. That is, the students would feel unconscientious if they did not produce work with 110 percent effort. Another advantage of the service-learning project is that it kept the advertising curriculum exciting and offered a greater challenge for students. It also added credibility to the advertising program. Advertising programs that can offer authentic projects in addition to class assignments illustrate the passion of the professor and the skill set of the students. Furthermore, before becoming an educator, the professor worked full-time in the advertising industry and she, at times, has missed the opportunity to be creative. Thus, service-learning projects allowed the professor to serve the role as Creative Director: the person in agency responsibility for overseeing the advertising project, working with the writers and artists, and pitching the project to the client.

The biggest disadvantage was the amount of extra work required; because the project was authentic, there was no room for error. Advertising projects require the advertiser (in this case the students and the professor) to know as much, if not more, about what is being advertised than the client (in this case the community partner). Another disadvantage was that the

project could, and did, run longer than the scheduled timeframe. For this advertising project, the timeframe was a semester. The disadvantage of the project running over schedule (longer than a semester) is that the time required to complete the project is not factored into the next semester, which can place demands on the professor's time or mean other work is neglected.

It is advantageous to place boundaries on a service-learning project. For example, for advertising projects there may need to be a limit on how many times the advertiser (the community partner) can make changes/modification to the advertising piece(s). In addition, the professor should receive confirmation from the community partner that the work will be distributed in the community and used to inform, persuade, or entertain. Last, the professor should request the community partner to provide letters of appreciation addressed to each student. The letter makes the students feel valued and the letter can be used during a job interview, because it speaks to their level of dedication.

Conclusion

Service-learning in an advertising course provides students the opportunity to learn-by-doing, adds ethos to their portfolios during a job interview, and heightens awareness of a community in need. Working with Beyond Housing, students in this designated service-learning course were able to communicate a message which could possibly save a resident's home from foreclosure. Approximately 2,000 residents were reached with this message and almost 60 residents were motivated to action by it from just one touch point of advertising. Although this service-learning project was conducted by students in an advertising course, the benefits of service-learning can be applied across other disciplines. Skills such as working in teams, paying attention to details, planning, measuring results, completing work within a budget, meeting deadlines, and working with a client are experiences applicable to many professions.

Service-learning presents academic advantages to students. The sole purpose of higher education is to promote critical thinking, by teaching students to analyze and then describe with rich descriptions, and by offering activities that challenge students to reach self-actualization. Service-learning also boosts civic advantages, because it encourages and promotes a relationship between the students and the community – the community where students will live, work, and develop on-going relationships after graduation for the betterment of the whole. As a result, service-learning provides added value to academia and students, because it extends the scope of learning, presents “real” experiences, connects students to the community, and extends the walls of the classroom. Ultimately, service-

learning is a pedagogy that provides students with authentic skills linked to the community and required by employers.

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Appendix A : Winning Door Hanger



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